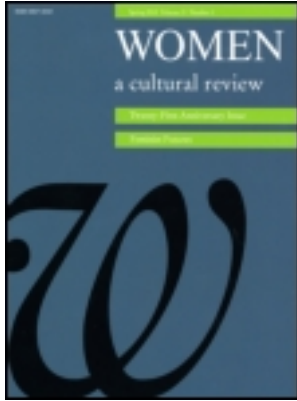


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Patricia MacCormack

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A Cinema of Desire: Cinesexuality and Guattari's A-signifying Cinema

Desire is forced to maintain itself in this space between reality and pleasure, this frontier that power jealously controls with the help of innumerable frontier guards: in the family, at school, in the barracks, at the workshop, in psychiatric hospitals and, of course, at the movies (Guattari 1996a:144).

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HILE Félix Guattari has written very little on cinema, his philosophical work frequently resonates around notions of power and desire in relation to signifying systems. Reading cinematic images along traditional paths of signification affirms the dialectic between subject and image that maintains established power structures. According to Guattari, signification, 'impose[s] a semiotic modelling on the body. And this is political. One must start modelling people in a way that ensures their semiotic receptiveness to the system' (Guattari 1996d:22). There is power in the reiteration of signification. Semiotic structures do not subject people to meaning. They allow them to become meaningful within systems established before their existence. Subjection to signification—what

Deleuze and Guattari call 'signification'—frequently operates through selecting from binary options, where one term is subjugated to the other. The subjugated binaries that will be important to this essay are women (to men), body (to mind), expression (to signification) and asemiotics (to semiotics). I will first describe the benefits and risks in challenging projects of signification as they relate to feminism, and then point out the ways in which the desiring event of cinema—what I have termed 'cinesexuality'—can reorient and rupture structures of signification through a focus on expression. The relation of cinesexuality to feminism will then be drawn, using Guattari's notion of asemiotic bodies: the 'homosexual' and 'woman'. This will be followed by some brief notes towards thinking cinesexuality as a form of 'becoming-woman'. The cinesexual emphasizes cinematic pleasure as a-signified, pleasure beyond signification that then challenges how genders, and indeed individuals as their own collective of disparate modalities, desire cinema.

Rethinking cinema can alter the way women have been both denied a specific gaze and defined as gazing either masochistically or as a male, while acknowledging that spectators desire cinema in excess of the meaning of images and their deferral to established sexualities. Cinema is a nexus of reality/fantasy, offering planes of pleasurable intensity of colour, framing, celerity and sound: what Guattari calls cinema's a-signifying elements. In this way desire for and in cinema reflects the ambiguities and problems psychoanalysis has found when addressing the 'question' of women's desire. Woman's desire does not necessarily fit into the phallically oriented structures of psychoanalysis, and pleasure in cinema does not correlate with structures of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Heterosexual and homosexual desire are based on the affirmation of the gender of the object of desire, which, depending on whether the object is the same or different, will thus constitute sexuality. A-signified aspects of cinematic pleasure complicate the gendering project traditional structures of sexuality maintain.

My exploration of the assemblage of cinema and viewer is simply the isolation of a frequent social situation. There is a contradiction here, as I am demarcating the cinematic event in order to challenge broader social paradigms, hence insinuating that to rethink cinema is to rethink the world. However challenging, cinematic paradigms can inevitably alter the conception of other structures of signification of desire. All systems, while not reflecting other systems, affect each other as eddies and flows affect the whole ocean. Today's information and communication machines do not merely convey representational contents, but also contribute to the fabrications of new *assemblages* of enunciation, individual and collective (Guattari 1996b:113). More important to this particular project is the specificity of cinema, the unique moment of

desire *only* available to us through that 'cinema' feeling: cinema as a lover we take, a form of sexuality that is not translatable to any other circumstance. In cinema we experience worlds that are neither available nor repeatable in the world outside the screen; thus their ability to be contained by signification is jeopardized. What does it mean to desire cinema? To desire cinematically? What is this 'thing' cinema that we desire?

Language, Systems, Signs

Cinema and feminism have been seduced and betrayed by the attractions of psychoanalysis and structuralism. Both describe the structuration of the subject: the way in which the subject is mapped through signifying systems. Psychoanalysis emphasizes the gender of the spectator as it corresponds to or differs from, and hence desires, the male 'subject' or female 'object' on screen. According to Guattari, cinema is populated with a-signifying intensities: 'linkages, internal movements of visual images, colours, sounds, rhythms, gestures, speech, etc.' (Guattari 1996a:150). These escape significations of gender and hetero- or homosexuality, but are nonetheless pleasurable aspects of cinema. Problems with psychoanalysis come not from what it says, but from what function the form of speech has and what values and meanings this speech augments or repeats. Guattari points out: 'Desire is power; power is desire. What is at issue is what type of politics is pursued with regard to different linguistic arrangements that exist' (Guattari 1996d:20). Psychoanalytic film theory translates a particular arrangement of desire into cinematic scenarios. Briefly the male spectator's gaze is presumed active/sadistic and heterosexual in its objectification of female forms. The female spectator is denied a gaze proper, relegated to masochistically identifying with the objectified woman on screen. Traditionally, psychoanalytic film theory has much in common with other modes of epistemological mappings of the subject, from the medical to the familial. Kaja Silverman writes:

Like the male subject, the female subject emerges only within discourse . . . Both are spoken by discourses and desires which exceed them. However, whereas the male subject has privileges conferred upon him by his relationship to discourse, the female subject is defined as insufficient through hers (Silverman 1984:131).

Woman's insufficiency—her lack—refers neither to her flesh nor to her subjectivity, but to her ability to navigate within and be conceived by systems that dam up intensities. Signifying systems defer images,

experiences and intensities to established signs and the relations between them, thus crystallizing their ambiguities as meaningful objects with inherent value (or devalue). Guattari describes structuralism's project of signification as trying 'moreover to systematically inject meaning into all signifying regimes that tend to escape it' (Guattari 1996a:149–50). Women escape phallic systems and those of signification, but they also enable such systems by being examples of what the valued terms in these systems are not. Gender and binary relations, such as male/female, hetero/homo and passive/active are affirmed.¹ Thus women are insufficient and exist sufficiently nonetheless; they are both less than one (castrated) and more than one (plethora).

Women are seen as a 'question' or 'problem' in psychoanalysis and in society because they both confound and repudiate the system of one: one meaning, one object (symbolized through the phallus) and one self. While women cannot define themselves they cannot, technically, 'be'. The power of women as confounding signification is not that they offer *an* alternative, but they make a fiction of the power to subsume anything by 'knowing' it, while resisting being representative of a single alternative to it. Similarly the way we desire planes of cinematic intensity unique to the screen world makes a fiction that cinema is a version of actual sexuality simply repeated on screen. Cinematically woman is given meaning through deferral to the higher order of 'not-man' or 'object of desire' (usually for the pleasure of the male character and/or spectator). Woman is not, according to Irigaray,

(a) unit(y), such as a letter, a number, a figure in a series, proper noun, unique object . . . by closing herself up over the unit of conception, by curling around that one, her desire hardens. *Perhaps it becomes phallic through this relationship to the one?* And likewise a femininity that conforms and corresponds too exactly to an idea—Idea—of woman, that is too obedient to a sex—to an Idea of sex—or to a frozen sex, has already frozen into phallomorphism (Irigaray 1985:229).

Woman in cinema is taken as fetish (a part that stands in for a whole) or object for male desire. The female spectator's desire remains an unresolved issue. This question risks defeating its own revolutionary possibilities by being answered. As soon as woman's desire 'is', it is essentialized. This conundrum of demanding the power to name oneself, while risking essentialization through such naming, is one that has plagued feminism. Simply because these systems refuse to acknowledge women as independent entities does not mean women cease to exist. In 2000 Alison Butler asked: 'what kind of future might there be for feminist film [theory and practice]?' (Butler 2000:73). She cites queer films, films

that deconstruct masculinity and films that 'offer the pleasures of [female] specificity and a systematised understanding of femininities' (77). Butler's claim that femininity has specificity, and it should be systematized, is, at best, a reversal of patriarchy. At worst it is a colonization of the admittedly problematic but also potentially liberating a-signified planes of pleasure women have received from film both in spite of and because heterosexual patterns within film theory repudiate their gaze and their control. Butler's claim raises the volatile issue of the question 'what is woman' which, even if located around history, is answered by the depressing and pessimistic response that all women are is shared oppression. Shared oppression, like power in masculinity, is a matter of degree. All subjects share forces of both, complicating the dualism of oppressor and oppressed, of power and resistance. No subject is only oppressed or only resistant. Jackie Byars, after Nancy Chodorow, claims that post-psychoanalytic feminist film theory perspectives are trans-gendered, and 'the male is rooted in objectivity and impartiality while the female perspective is based on a blurring of boundaries between self and other, allowing feelings to influence thought' (Byars 1990:113). Byars reverses value rather than challenging stereotypes. I imagine Byars means 'masculine' and 'feminine' rather than male and female. Freud had already demarcated this ambiguity within each subject as a mixture of masculine and feminine. 'The reactions of human individuals of both sexes are, of course, made up of masculine and feminine traits' (Freud 1991:339). Is Byars's a really post-psychoanalytic perspective? While it emphasizes the ambiguity of femininity, does it challenge polarized significations within trans-gendered spectatorship? The problem with much post-psychoanalytic feminist film theory is the reliance on exchanging binaries and their associated terms. What happens when there is sexuality without the possibility of heterosexual or homosexual union? What happens to gender if sexuality is not based on oppositional terms?

Modal Memories: Feminism and Cinesexuality

Within the question, 'what do I see and do I desire it?', we can include 'how am I affected by the multi-sensorial visual plane?' Cinema is not dialectic, it is an event. The screen is frontier limit. A situation is a positioning of (usually) two. An event describes the encounter, the act rather than the position of two 'subjects' (as much as a film can be called subject). The event of viewing includes but is not limited to a constellation of body, desire, memory, inclination, environment, image and affect, more or less important in each instance.² The self as modalities then forms the spectator component within the viewing machine. Self is

expressed as a constellation of modes. At any one time self is extricated from others, self as memory, self as fantasy, self as warring or contradictory desires: the subject as a particular coalescence of intensified or decreased modes. All of these modes are co-present within the one space, even before time, which transforms each plane of intensity and distributes modalities at every infinitesimal moment. While not wishing to claim women and men watch differently, it would be foolish to claim any viewer watches independent of the history of their relationship to signifying regimes. If viewing self includes a modality of memory (including individual and social history) assembled as an immanent remembered present with screen, then the particularities of that memory, including its oppressions, subjugations and powers, are co-present with the event. One's self is mapped according to the importance placed on these memories and the modal configurations they make with the present self. The self is interactive or interceded with and by memories of subjectivity and can acknowledge the importance of this subjectivity in the act of viewing depending on which modalities are intensified. According to Seyla Benhabib, within overarching dominant history, memory refers to the specific experiences of the other. Acknowledging the memory of the other within historical narratives of the dominant makes the other as a generalized concept material and specific. In Benhabib concrete interaction with the memory of being women within phallographic history is essential to making poststructuralist theory ethical. She points out Jean-François Lyotard's contrasting of "the grand narratives" of the Enlightenment to the "petit recits" of women, children, fools and primitives' (Benhabib 1992:15). She criticizes modernity and postmodernity because in both '*the paradigm of language has replaced the paradigm of consciousness*' (208, original emphasis). Consciousness is awareness of memory. In schizoanalysis, the unconscious is co-present with consciousness as the a-signified aspects of cinema are co-present with those aspects in which we find meaning. This meaning flees before it is apprehended. While I say we must think the act of viewing beyond dualisms, including those of gender, I am adamantly not saying a future beyond dualism is a forgetting of the histories and memories of suffering and oppression, as well as the acts of power, experienced and expressed by individuals and groups of subjects.

Spectator and screen form a machinic assemblage. 'Machinic' should not be confused with mechanical. 'Machinic configurations do not recognise distinctions between persons, organs, material flows, and semiotic flows' (Guattari 1996f:46). The spectator and screen machine is a 'composition of deterritorialising intensities' (Guattari 1995:38). It is an arrangement of a body and a surface, but the machine is independent of

the materiality of its parts, according to Guattari. It describes the system of connection by which the components perturb and affect each other as they are perturbed and affected. Each perturbation shifts points of intensification and changes the direction of flows, making some areas dense and others dissipated. The territory is remapped, deterritorialization leading to a recomposition. But the machine structure itself, the act of watching, remains the same. The indeterminability of the ways in which images will be received as meaningful will affect the levels of reorganization. An image oriented around its most predictable meaning will cause intensities to pass along frequently travelled trajectories. An asemiotic expression may reorganize the flows between the components in different directions, shifting the intensified and de-escalated areas of the relations. The way films are made and marketed presumes and acknowledges the machinic arrangement of viewer and film. Genre, sequel and mainstream marketable films seek to reterritorialize the machine's intensities with sufficient perturbation balanced by a reiteration of previous flow patterns. No image or signification is guaranteed, so seeking to exploit previous flows within the machine does not prevent the flows within any image's relationship to its meaning leaking beyond its limits. The nature of the components is malleable and volatile. Asemiotic components may shift the intensities within the machine by exploiting our reliance on expectation in order to break it. All that can be guaranteed is the structure itself between the screen and viewer.

Expressive Cinema: Some Examples of Asemiotics

According to Guattari, semiotics and signifying systems subject the intricate and infinite complexity of expression to transmission of information, what Guattari calls a 'bit', as a coded object of exchange. Represented forms are examples of 'bits'. They exchange information taken from and able to fit back into semiotic systems. We read each bit in an image populated with forms. Here is a table, here is a dog, here is a woman, here is a man. These forms relate to each other in particular ways. A bit's form signifies its value and relationship to other bits. Gendered characters on screen are both bits to each other and to the spectator. Colour, including its saturation, sound and movement are examples of cinematic expressions. Red is given the signification of blood to make it an informative bit, gesture informs as a substitute for a word and so forth. Expression is found beforehand, and exceeds its function within a bit of information. Expression emphasizes content more than form; it is part of the content of a form but not the form itself. Unlike information, expression is not received but affects the spectator in

indeterminable ways. Quoting Christian Metz, Guattari emphasizes content in relation to expression: 'Other elements of the filmic text are themselves languages whose matter of content has no precise boundaries' (Guattari 1996a:150). Form as information creates a unified, comprehensible object. Meaning imposes itself on expression, remapping it as an object of information. What is it to express? Expression seems to have a proximity to abstraction. Abstract verbs describe emotions, states of minds, intensities of feeling. Expressive elements could tentatively be called 'feminine' because, like women, they refuse signification but are given meaning via linkage to a higher order of signification. Colour and sound are abstract. Both are experienced as sensorial intensity independent and in excess of their relation to form—as pure hue, saturation, timbre, inflection and volume. Colour names are abstract until they are connected to a secondary term. Each must be anchored by a form that it can then describe and give information about. German Expressionism emphasizes cinema as more than a series of forms to read and understand within a frame. It foregrounds movement, uncanny gestures created by imaginative editing and the cutting-up of forms with unusual shadows and angles. The tree-branch fingers, frozen shoulders and insect head of Graf Orlock (Max Schreck) in *Nosferatu* (dir. F. W. Murnau, 1922) expresses form through tension of flesh. His movement is made by montage rather than filming him walking naturally. His form is absence as his shadow crawls up the stairs. Form is kinetic in his seemingly contradictory fluid and jolted movement, and it becomes trajectory in his sweeping rising, while physically prostrate, from his sarcophagus. Form disappears into the shadows, becoming a series of intensities of light and dissolving shade more than outline. In *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (dir. Robert Wiene, 1920) the form of somnambulist Cesare (Conrad Veidt) angulates with the other irrational angles within each frame. His outline is lost as he is camouflaged within the frame, outlines cross divergent trajectories and forms are created that do not describe objects but planes or sections of light and shade. The content of these newly created outlines do not signify information based on form. Shadow, line of black and white, movement and intensifications of points within the frame affect the viewer. Character (inherently related to form, which signifies gender) and the metonymic relationship of forms to each others to create narrative logic are less important than the asemiotic expression from the shadows, reterritorialized lines and dramatic movements.

When the spectator does not focus on male or female characters as objects of desire, what is the pleasure of jolted movement? Of chiaroscuro? When colour, gesture and sound evoke desire, pleasure exists beyond desiring a person on screen. Cinema elicits a unique form of

desire through the experience of its aural, visual, visceral expression. Experiencing cinema inclusive of the aspects of expression outside of signification and comprehension of form does not rely on established genders and objects that create sexual dialectics. It is nonetheless a most compelling aspect. Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (1974) offers cinematic breaks in its relatively traditional narrative, showing that these breaks can (and do) occur in most cinematic production simply because it is cinema. As a murder mystery (properly the Italian genre *giallo*) it relies on narrative, and forms as clues, but there are a-signifying breaks that exploit cinematic expressiveness. Immediately the title speaks only of colour, which expresses content usually in need of a noun. 'Red' is formless. Early in the film, psychic Helga Ullman (Macha Méril) sits on stage predicting future murders. Her words are clearly important. The camera breaks away from mid-shot to a seemingly arbitrary extreme close-up of her mouth dribbling water into the glass from which she has sipped. This image breaks the signifying chain. It disinform the speech to which the spectator intensely listens. Perhaps retrospectively we may speak of the symbolic aspect of this image, but at the moment it breaks the chain, it ruptures outward, organizing the image as connected to us rather than metonymically to the forms of the previous and following frame. The image is one of those 'filmy' moments, an event only available in film, in which the texture of a sip of water may be experienced, in which the spitting of a mouthful becomes mesmerizing. Later in *Deep Red* there is a rather brutal murder that, because of its violence and explicit gore, is difficult to watch, emphasizing the submission of spectator to film. But, again, something ruptures the chain. Psychiatrist Professor Giordani's (Gluco Mauri) head is placed on the end of a table and a knife is thrust down vertically to stab the back of his neck. The cinesexual aspect of the scene is evoked because the camera is fixed to the knife and not to the floor, and so the still forms move while the moving form is still. Vertigo through trajectory and velocity occurs, as the spectator, usually situated in a still position, watches the world thrust upward rather than the knife thrust downward.

Surrealist Jan Svankmajer's three short films that make up *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) express through movement and texture. In 'Passionate Discourse' two heads of plasticine bristle, tear at each other and create a third element, but because their form is mobile they do not deform each other; neither is their progeny a repetition of themselves. Fragments of fruit and machinery spin and speed around the frame, composing and recomposing from transforming matter in 'Exhaustive Discussion' until they are reduced to nothing. Guattari claims Dadaists play 'gratuitous games' (Guattari 1996f:56), cutting up reality and thus innocently

revealing reality is already an organization of cut-up pieces. In reality each piece is unified as an individual and the organization of each piece is unified, hierarchically and genealogically: arborescent. In Dadaism the pieces are pure multiplicity, they are defined by their mobile connections with other pieces and their movement, so their nature continually breaks and forms new semiotic systems: rhizomatic. Guattari sees the use of art in breaking significations as able to become the catalyst to similar breaks in reality. Surrealism addresses language more explicitly than Dadaism to deform it. In 'Factual Conversation' two heads poke out objects on their tongue. For each object the other head offers a corresponding object: toothbrush, toothpaste, shoe, shoelace etc. In the second section these objects meet non-corresponding objects—toothbrush to shoelace, bread to toothpaste and so on—showing breaking signification through surprising connections. The final section sees the objects meet themselves, signifying nothing without a metonymic context. How do we define one against itself rather than against its opposite or its place in a signifying chain? Svankmajer is interesting as much because of the asemiotic as the break with semiotic. More than these games, it is the movement, the jolty stop-motion, the random sounds and the texture of the plasticine—or indeed the texture of the stop-motion and the jolt of the plasticine—that I find most cinematically engaging. The texture and kinetics of the films are emphatically visceral and affect the flesh. One's fingers twitch, stomach clenches, entirely due to the strange manoeuvres of the objects and writhing of the plasticine. A-signification is not the exchange of signification for no (or an ambiguous) signification but an enhancement of the zones within signification that confound and deterritorialize it, altering the geography and the pathways of the cartographies of meaning and the experiencing of it.

The Cinesexual and Cinemasochism

Thus far I have generally sketched some ideas about how the desiring event of cinema impacts on the theorization of subjects. I have asked how we can acknowledge the vital role of feminism and the rights of women when we seek to destabilize notions of fixed subjectivity and signification? I will now make some even briefer notes on the way in which watching images can be a catalyst for a form of becoming-woman through what I have termed 'cinemasochism'. Becoming is the action of entering the self into a participation with another element thus forming a unique relational structure that changes both terms and spreads forth to create a series of limitless connections with other terms. Becoming does not form a unity but a contagion. Any self's becoming both exploits that self's

specificity and dissipates its quality through its relation to the specificities of the other becoming term, changing the organization and powers of both, through unique patternings forming mobile hybrids. Becoming is not 'like', or 'as', the other term. Becoming is a movement rather than a project towards which a goal is identified. Guattari (and Deleuze and Guattari) define becoming as 'no longer a question of gradual resemblances, ultimately arriving at an identification...it is a question of ordering differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:236). Neither imitation nor filiation, becoming is a form of production in which the two terms are necessarily altered by their relation. Becoming is not the marriage of forms but the alchemy of contents, content as verb (expressive, dynamic content) not noun (informative form or bit).³ The alliance element is usually traditionally subjugated: woman, animal and music (because its signification is not stable). Deleuze and Guattari's maligned notion that in order to enter into a becoming-otherwise all subjects must first enter into a becoming-woman usually focuses on the misguided fetishistic aspect of 'woman' over the key point that 'what is essential here is not the object in question, but the transformational movement' (Guattari 1996c:37). Guattari's claim resonates with his points on expression and his use of Metz to critique form. Expression is content in transformational movement. Guattari frequently cites dance as an asemiotic art because of its emphasis on movement and explicitly the body. Guattari recognizes these alignments. 'Each time the body is emphasised in a situation—by dancers, by homosexuals, etc.—something breaks with the dominant semiotics that crush these semiotics of the body. In heterosexual relations as well, when a man becomes body, he becomes feminine' (Guattari 1996f:47). Referring to traditional binaries, woman is historically relegated to the body in the mind/body split. The homosexual also finds himself [*sic*] in the subjugated side of these binaries. Cinema beyond psychoanalysis makes the image material, fleshy, because of its ability to have an effect beyond signification of objects within a frame. Asemiotic cinematic pleasure experiences cinema corporeally, not in order to transcribe images. But does that necessarily make cinesexuality feminine? And is Guattari here returning to the binary systems he repudiates? Another question that both contextualizes Guattari's call to becoming body/woman/homo and contradicts itself is: should women become woman/homo/body when they are yet to be granted form? Can woman be recognized form without being object of information or exchange, without being 'bits'.⁴ Guattari admits to using the feminine contentiously, as a starting point, because it is the first asemiotic break in the dominance of masculine signifying systems. Similarly homosexuality is

the first rupture in culture's presumption of heterosexuality as both natural and normal.

Does Guattari call to becoming-woman because of its memory rather than its meaning? 'Desire is not informed, informing; it's not information or content. Desire is not something that deforms but that disconnects, changes, modifies, organises other forms and then abandons them' (Guattari 1996f:61). Does he signify not through what one is but through the call to not-being, the very problem women have experienced and that was discussed above? If there are no longer subjective pathways, does this mean there can no longer be regiments, of meaning and power, associated with gender? In 'Becoming-Woman', Guattari uses the (yet to be signified, or only signified as 'not-man') signifier 'woman' as aligned with the masochist, the prostitute, the homosexual and other forms of 'sexual minorities' (Guattari 1996e:41). Cinesexuality is not an acknowledged sexuality, but one in which all viewers partake; thus when cinema is read as a-signifying, cinesexuality is a becoming-sexual-minority of all viewers. George Stambolian paraphrases Guattari as saying 'all forms of sexual activity are minority forms and reveal themselves as being irreducible to homo/hetero oppositions' (Guattari 1996f:47). Guattari acknowledges that his deferral to binaries is a tactic to begin movement. If all sexuality is a becoming-woman, then after becoming-woman we must ask, 'what next?' When there is all, there cannot be two. Guattari claims we must all become woman; I claim we are all already cinesexual. All forms of pleasure at the cinema are bodily, beyond reading/experiencing oppositions. All images are potentially asemiotic, because all exceed signification of form and logical relation to other forms. All images rupture out while they move along. The question is not whether something is or isn't a minority sexuality, or asemiotic, but to what extent it elicits the reterritorialization of intensities not reducible to affirmed or exchanged binaries.

Contradictory to much spectatorship theory that posits the gaze as powerful, cinema primarily requires the viewer to submit to the image. Psychoanalysis emphasizes the masochistic positioning of the female spectator but in the face of the cinematic image all spectators lose themselves. Cinema presents the paradox of actual worlds that are impossible in the 'real', thus confounding possibility and reality (the images may not be true, but they are real in that they exist). 'Impossible' here can mean the presentation of fantasy worlds or fantasy narratives, because they are extricated from real life (science-fiction, horror) or because their neat narratives defy the complexity of reality (romances). 'Impossible' also refers to the unique patterns of framing, speed, lighting and kinaesthetics that constitute cinesexual pleasure. Cinesexuality

requires the viewer to come to cinema with an openness to the pure possible. Spectators 'gift' themselves to the indeterminability of affects and breaks in signifying systems. Submitting oneself to film is submitting to affects that indulge in the breaking down of logic and of the flesh itself: horror films, films set in fictitious worlds, dream films. An obvious example of the gifting spectator is the viewer of horror film, particularly baroque gore films that exploit the breakdown of the body into unrecognisable flesh (what is the gender of entrails?). The films of Lucio Fulci, particularly *City of the Living Dead* (1980) and *The Beyond* (1980), are good examples. Narrative is rudimentary, as is character development. Both films are essentially about what happens when the residents of a town in *City* and a hotel in *Beyond* become living dead, but not relatable to the living dead of horror genealogy: they are neither voodoo zombies nor cannibalistic zombies. The films are reduced to a series of spectacles that show the body ruptured, altered, suppurating and dishevelled. These are not violent aggressive films. Zombification is purely transformation, resulting not from murders, but from infection presenting with unpredictable symptoms. What matters is the matter of the flesh. Watching the dishevelment of bodies into organs is a pleasurable trauma. The films are dreamlike, their events impossible. 'Narrative' (as far as one could call these narratives), events and logic remain unresolved. No catharsis is available. The cinesexual spectator should not expect information, by way of forms, that may translate to their sexuality. They should experience expression that evokes repulsion desire, bodily ruptures that evoke becoming-body. These films are often maligned as incoherent, too visceral, illogical, all 'feminine' terms.

Even in a theatre, the libidinal intensities of cinema are experienced between the solitary spectator and the screen. This means the self is taken as the primary sacrifice in the face of cinesexual desire, and that any attempts to signify the other are prevented, which prevents falling into the problems of the oppressed signified (or adamantly not signified in the case of women) by the oppressor. Cinesexuality is expressed not in what one watches but in how one is altered. It involves a kind of passivity to the possibilities of the affects of the image, which is itself passive in that it cannot respond to us after the event of cinema. Cinesexuality then is participation of double passivity. It requires submission by all viewers, so all viewers must first place themselves as open to the pain and innovation of losing self as meaning is forsaken. All viewers take the first step that most resonates with the masochistic spectatorial position to which most film theory relegated the female spectator. Perhaps all becoming-cinesexual must first pass through the minority sexuality of becoming-cinemasochist? Masochism here is more a form of openness, a sacrifice of

signification, not a repetitive pattern of pain. Masochism describes the hurt involved in foregoing the self, its associated significations, pre-established functions and values, when entering into becomings. There is clearly pain for women in forsaking the signification as subjects they have yet to receive, but it is as important that, while much feminist film theory has called for women to be empowered spectators, we acknowledge there is power in submission to a-signified desire. The more one is signified and reified the more one feels the masochist's pain/pleasure and the more one *should* submit. Guattari emphasizes that becoming is more urgent for men, particularly hetero men, than for those entities signified to a lesser degree. Reading an image encloses the image within the self's signification. To be affected by an image acknowledges the contagion of the image in altering the viewer, and of the viewer's act of watching as a mix of reading and experiencing. Masochism through foregoing signification includes the physical sensations of the experience by the visceral nature of cinematic affect. It is simultaneously and inextricably corporeal as much as structural. Submission to a-signification is a step rather than the taking up of a marginal position, which questions the politics and value of desiring positions of power. If sexuality is irreducible to binaries, desire (particularly in horror cinema) is irreducible to pleasure/unpleasure, delight/disgust, seduction and perversion. Cinesexuality is a form of sexuality enjoyed by all bodies. Maurice Blanchot states:

But when we confront things themselves, if we stare at a face, a corner of a room, doesn't it also sometimes happen that we abandon ourselves to what we see, that we are at its mercy, powerless before this presence that is suddenly strangely mute and passive? (Blanchot 1981:80).

Blanchot's demarcation of the ecstasy of desire elicited by submission to the quietest of images seems particularly resonant with cinema, which encourages us to see and to stare, at the mercy of the a-signified and asignifiable. The event and risks of openness to cinesexuality is the becoming-woman of all viewers, masochism as a suffering due to lack of meaning that torments the self as meaningful: a cinematic becoming-woman I call cinemasochism. Cinemasochism refuses the notion that becoming-man of the female-owned sadistic gaze and modes of signification is the only form of cinematic spectatorial feminism. Cinemasochism exploits differences between and within subjects rather than the taking up of positions by selves. It does not require the circulation of value in spectatorial positions, just as a-signification does not require the circulation of signs as meanings with inherent values. 'In the last resort', writes Guattari, 'what will be determinant in the political and aesthetic plane is

not the words and the content of ideas but essentially a-signifying messages that escape dominant ideologies' (Guattari 1996a:154). Before and beyond what is watched, cinema offers us a 'how to desire' that is different to other forms of desire, both in how we are positioned within the machinic assemblage of cinesexual desire and the call to submit to forms of a-signification both available to all who view images and nowhere else in the world.

Notes

- 1 Deleuze and Guattari call this 'biunivocalization', a selection from a series of binaries that unify into one sign. The example they use in *A Thousand Plateaus* is the face (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The face is the most immediate encounter of readable subjectivity, where flesh becomes sign: black old woman, young white man and so forth.
- 2 I do not have the space here to go into the particularities of the televisual event as it differs from the cinematic one; suffice it to say each has its own separate configurations. My focus on film (including home cinema) precludes discussions of the more evident didactic function of many television programmes.
- 3 This mercilessly rudimentary discussion of becoming is brief due to constraints of space, but the key aspect is Guattari's notion of 'woman' and so it is this term that is emphasized in the expression 'becoming-woman'.
- 4 Many feminist film theorists have commented on the breakdown of women as object into women as, literally, bits in film through framing and focusing on eyes, mouth, breasts and buttock. A dismembering of woman's body fetishizes parts while both refusing the whole as subject and affirming the whole as object.

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